



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Thousands Will Take To Streets On Walk To School Day**

**(Salt Lake City, UT)** – As many as 50,000 students from over 100 schools throughout Utah will join students from around the country to celebrate Walk to School Day on October 2, 2002. Last year, more than 600,000 parents, kids and community leaders from 49 states walked to school that day.

“The purpose of Walk to School Day is to promote health, safety, physical activity and concern for the environment,” says walk coordinator Jane Lambert, Utah Department of Health. “Walkers from the U.S. will join more than 25 countries from around the world to celebrate the third Walk to School Day.”

The October 2 event begins with kids, parents and community leaders walking along specified routes that lead them safely to school. Other special activities associated with the walk include A Healthier You 2002™ Gold Medal Mile events, walking school buses, pedestrian safety education, and child health and safety activities. In several communities, local businesses have donated items to enhance the event.

Utah’s Walk to School Day organizers, including local PTA leaders, are anxious to demonstrate to students and their parents that walking to school can be a fun, safe, and healthy experience. In many schools, “Walkability Checklists” are distributed to parents to identify community locations that may be dangerous for students and pedestrians. The checklist is a tool for community leaders to help make their neighborhoods safer places to walk by improving sidewalks and crossings.

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Moderate, daily physical activity, such as walking or bicycling, has long been recognized as an essential ingredient of a healthy lifestyle. Yet many Americans, both young and old, lead a sedentary lifestyle. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation's Nationwide Personal Transportation Survey, the number of trips the average American adult takes on foot each year dropped 42 percent between 1975 and 1995. Among children, walking trips dropped 37 percent. Only 10 percent of public school students are estimated to walk to school today compared to a majority of students a generation ago. In the U.S. the most common means of transportation to school is by car.

Opportunities for physical activity in schools have diminished. Many physical education classes and even recesses have been dropped due to shifting priorities. After school, kids are driven to events, to the mall or to a friends' house. Add in a daily dose of television, often accompanied by high-calorie snack foods, and it's no wonder that so many young people find themselves outside the recommended height/weight range. This increase in obesity closely follows a decline in walking and bicycling.

Walking to school gives students a chance to increase their daily physical activity without taking time away from important classroom instruction. Walking and other physical activities can help students control increased weight gain, as well as enhance their feelings of independence and well-being, strengthen growing bodies, and teach valuable lifetime health habits.

For information about Walk to School Day, call Jane Lambert at (801) 538-6241, or visit the official web site at [www.walktoschool.org](http://www.walktoschool.org)

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